



PLANTING HOPE,  
*Growing Faith*

MICHAEL AND TRACI BYRD SPREAD SEEDS OF THE GOSPEL OVER INNER-CITY SAINT LOUIS.

After his parents' separation and subsequent divorce, Michael Byrd experienced what felt like a gaping hole in his life that he couldn't seem to fill. "I tried to [fill it] with friends, girls, my daughter, work, and even school—but none of it worked," he said. Running out of places to search for fulfillment, Michael found himself at a men's group. There, a man named Aaron Foster shared the gospel with him. In the weeks after that poignant encounter, Michael found healing for his brokenness, and his emptiness filled as he grasped the heart-piercing message Aaron shared. "I dropped to my knees and begged the Lord to save me," Michael said.

## PRIMED FOR PLANTING

Michael could not keep the hope he had found to himself—or the peace that had once seemed unattainable. As his heart and life became more firmly rooted in the gospel, he grew in his relationship with the Lord, and a calling to ministry became clear—specifically to reach inner-city Saint Louis, Missouri. "As I served as a youth pastor at a local church in Saint Louis, the Lord began to stir my heart for the inner city," he explained. "While I didn't quite [understand] that what I was doing or being called to was 'missions,' I knew strongly that I was wired to be added to the number bringing gospel truth and discipleship to the city."

At first, Michael's calling felt elusive, but when he realized God was guiding him every step of the way, the vision became richer, and joy quickly followed. Michael and his wife, Traci, and their children—Triniti, Makayla, Michael Jr., and Tyler—were not only led to plant a church in an area burdened with high rates of poverty and crime, they also felt led to plant their lives there with the goal of truly living alongside and loving their neighbors. They stepped out in faith, not yet knowing shared meals, group cooking lessons, and even trips to the grocery store would become pathways to building gospel-centered relationships. "Reading Titus 1 gave me a great understanding and a deep encouragement to know not only why I'm in the inner city but [also why I will] stay there," Michael said.

*This letter is from Paul, a slave of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ. I have been sent to proclaim faith to those God has chosen and to teach them to know the truth that shows them how to live godly lives. This truth gives them confidence that they have eternal life, which God—who does not lie—promised them before the world began. And now at just the right time he has revealed this message, which we announce to everyone. It is by the command of God our Savior that I have been entrusted with this work for him. —Titus 1:1–3 NLT*

## ROOTED IN LOVE

The Byrds consider it a privilege to serve their community of Jennings, Missouri, through their church plant, Faith Community Bible Church. Its mission is to make Christ known by caring for the community. "Within a three-mile radius, our community is 91 percent African American; 99.1 percent English speaking; 61 percent single-parent homes," reported Michael. "Our community is a predominantly 'Christian' community with a form of godliness but at times seems to lack the power of God. With the average median income in our area being less than \$30,000 a year, our biggest community needs are gospel centrality, care, and life skills."

Faith Community Bible Church meets those needs by intentionally creating a place where people in the community can count on receiving care and unconditional love and support. "Through life on life, Sunday gathering, growth groups, and Wednesdays in the Word, we attempt to not only teach care but embody it," Michael said.

As lead pastor, he is responsible for preaching and teaching, discipleship, and leadership development and growth of the expanding staff. He also writes curriculum, prepares sermon series, and aims to lead the church to "do ministry where life exists" by caring for the community.

"My wife, Traci, not only leads worship but also serves as our community engagement director. [She] plans missions events and helps get others signed up to support the mission," Michael said. "My son Michael Jr. serves on the [audiovisual] team."

## FIELDWORK

Spurred on by the command in Psalm 46:10 to "be still, and know that I am God," a typical day for Michael begins with prayer. "While it was difficult getting it started, it has now become a regular rhythm that I enjoy and hate to miss," said Michael. "First Thessalonians 5:16–18 has been a great help—knowing that I am to always pray and to simply tell the Lord *thank you*."

Prayer has also strengthened Michael and Traci's boldness to courageously share their faith and to be disciples who make disciples. After his focused time of morning prayer, Michael takes time to exercise before meeting with people in the community. "It's a joy to not only spend time in the community but to [also] see people excited about what's happening," he said. "What [becomes] challenging is . . . creating the boundaries needed [so I don't get] overextended." Both Michael and Traci's favorite pastime is spending time with their family, reflecting on and celebrating the ways God is moving among them.

A recent reason for praise is their church's men's Bible study group. At first, Michael met every other week with two men. Now the group has grown to 12 men who meet every week. "From [that group], a second group has started

and is now being led by another brother from our church. Walking through the gospel with them has been amazing.”

They are also rejoicing over watching their friend Dom be so fueled by Scripture that he has started to share the gospel at his place of work. He even led one of his coworkers to Christ.

## HARVEST

A frequent statement you’ll hear at Faith Community Bible Church is, “If we are not a praying church, dissolve us.” With this intention in mind, church leadership has purposefully created rhythms of prayer, designating specific times to pray as a church body. “Every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 6:30 a.m., we are praying,” Michael said. “On Wednesday evening from 6–7 p.m., we are praying. Every Sunday at 10:15 a.m., we are praying.” Through this time, they have been encouraged by the prayers the Lord has answered and have learned not to give up praying for others. Following are a few of their answered prayers and continued requests:

- The Lord has bridged a generational divide at the church.
- More men are leading and being better examples in their homes.
- Traci and Michael are growing in their communication, spending a lot of time together, and are getting in the Word more together.
- Pray the Lord would continue to grow Faith Community Bible Church to carry out its mission of evangelism and discipleship.
- The third floor of the church building, which is the student wing, is without heating and air conditioning. Pray the Lord would provide the resources to complete the work so the children and student ministries can kick off in a healthy and vibrant way.
- Serving the community can be heart-wrenching at times. Pray Michael, Traci, and the church wouldn’t grow weary in doing good.
- Both Michael and Traci’s daughters live in different states. Pray for their salvation and that they would connect with someone who could help them grow in the gospel.

- In ministry, the family rhythms of life can often be thrown off. Pray the Byrds would set healthy boundaries in their lives.

## WATERING THE MINISTRY

“Faith Community Bible Church wouldn’t exist without the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering,” said Michael. The offering has provided encouragement and financial support for pastors, aided in building needs, and contributed toward community outreach and care.

Southern Baptists can join in the mission through prayer, missions, and financial support. “We serve in a tough, low socioeconomic area, which makes reaching people with the gospel extremely difficult [and] causes some to not trust in what is being shared,” Michael explained. Faith Community Bible Church also regularly needs missions teams to assist in engaging the community with projects like door knocking, random acts of kindness, and community cleanups that show a tangible expression of the gospel. “We are extremely thankful for the opportunity to serve our community in partnership with [Missionary Baptist] churches,” he said.

## SPROUTS

The people of Faith Community Bible Church engage students of all ages with fun events, with intentional conversations, and by showing care and concern while finding ways to point them to Jesus. Michael wants children and teens to know Jesus is the true hero of their souls. “The gospel is the only story in history where the hero died for the villain,” he said.

Learn more about the Byrds and Faith Community Bible Church:

Website: [fbcbstl.com](http://fbcbstl.com)

Facebook: [facebook.com/fbcbstl](https://www.facebook.com/fbcbstl)

Instagram: [@fbcbstl](https://www.instagram.com/fbcbstl)

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# Saint Louis: Planting Hope, Growing Faith



**BEFORE THE SESSION:** Search online for basic facts about Saint Louis to share with the group.

## FOR GROUP OR CHURCHWIDE STUDY:

1. Share an overview of Saint Louis. Ask any participants who have visited or lived in the city to share their experience.
2. Say, *Michael Byrd came to faith in Christ when someone shared the gospel with him at a men's group.* Discuss the importance of men's and women's ministries at your church.
3. Say, *The Byrd family planted a church in urban Saint Louis, which they say is a diverse area with many socioeconomic needs.* Ask participants to consider what it may have cost for the Byrds to follow God's call to live and minister in this area.
4. Break into small groups and ask participants to discuss the needs of those who live near your church and how you can best meet them. Ask each group to share their ideas. Write their responses on a board or large piece of paper taped to the wall.
5. Close in prayer by asking volunteers to pray for each of the Byrd family's prayer requests.



## FOR FAMILY STUDY:

1. Say, *The Byrd family moved to serve in Saint Louis.* Ask family members to share what they would think if God called your family to move to a new area to serve Him.
2. Say, *The Byrds' son Michael Jr. serves on the audiovisual team at their church.* Ask your children to think about ways other children serve at your church and share how they think they could serve as well.
3. Say, *The Byrd family and the congregation at Faith Community Bible Church think praying is the most important thing they can do.* As a family, consider ways you can make prayer a priority in your daily life.
4. Discuss what it means to be a hero. Refer to Michael's quote, "The gospel is the only story in history where the hero died for the villain." Ask, *Do you believe Jesus is your hero?*
5. Pray together for each member of the Byrd family, including Michael, Traci, and each of their children, Triniti, Makayla, Michael Jr., and Tyler.



## FOR INDIVIDUAL STUDY:

1. Have you ever experienced a "gaping hole" in your life like the one Michael felt? What did you do to try to fill it? Did you look to things such as friends, work, school, or family? Did they provide the fulfilment you were searching for?
2. Have you ever felt God stirring your heart for a particular ministry as He did with Michael? How did you respond to His calling?
3. Read Titus 1:1-3. How does this passage encourage you in God's calling on your life?
4. The Byrd family says beginning each day with prayer is vital for their ministry. If you don't currently start your day with prayer, how could doing so help you?
5. Write the Byrd family's prayer requests on individual cards. Place them around your house as reminders to pray regularly for them and Faith Community Bible Church.

LACI POST writes historical fiction and articles from Dallas, Georgia. Her author website is [thewarsonseries.com](http://thewarsonseries.com).